

# **THE REALITY OF REFORM**

## **Factors Limiting the Reform of Washington's Elementary Schools**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the Washington State Education Reform Act was passed in 1993, schools throughout the state of Washington have been under pressure to increase student achievement and to align their curricula with the new Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs). Research suggests that *successful restructuring is possible within Washington schools, and is the result of careful planning, collaboration and teamwork among teachers, principals, and parents, clear and common goals, redirected resources including time, and an ownership and belief in the restructuring process. Increased academic achievement follows from these efforts, and is not the result of any specific set of curriculum materials or teaching practices.* The necessary components for reforming schools and increasing achievement have been known for many years, yet a number of elementary schools in this state have yet to do what needs to be done to improve student learning. Why is this so?

There are two purposes of this study:

- **To identify school, personnel, legal, and other factors that are preventing the needed changes from taking place.**
- **To identify the prerequisite changes necessary before a successful principal would consent to take over a failing school.**

Research has clearly shown that *instructional leadership within the school is of paramount importance.* The fate of school reform in Washington is dependent, in part, on the instructional leadership capabilities of the principal found in each school.

The focus of this research emerged from a study we released last year. In that study we were interested in the changes in specific educational practices since 1993, but we were also interested in ascertaining the degree to which restructuring efforts, in the view of the teachers, would actually lead to systemic and meaningful change in the lives of the students and what they are to learn, and if they thought these changes would be lasting. For example, Goodman (1995) identified ameliorative or first order change that results in greater efficiency, but does not change the essence of the educational experience. In contrast, radical reform or “second order change” alters the underlying philosophical beliefs driving practice.

In our previous study we defined a restructured school as one that has undergone changes that reflect second order or fundamental changes in school philosophy and practice, and where those changes are driven by a collaborative process and clearly defined goals. The most significant finding in our last study was that achievement gains have been greater in the elementary and middle/junior high schools where restructuring

has taken place than in those schools where it has not. Our first purpose in this study was to identify what factors work to prevent second order changes from taking place.

The accountability plans in many states include special assistance to and/or sanctions for schools that do not make the necessary improvements in student achievement in a given period of time. This often includes new leadership for the school. There is an implied assumption, however, that a successful principal will willingly take on a struggling or failing school. That may or may not be the case. A strong principal may hesitate to take over a school if there are a number of disabling factors still in place that may prevent second order changes from taking place. The second purpose of this study was to identify the prerequisite changes necessary before a successful principal would consent to take over a failing school.

We wanted to find out the perspectives of those people who are most directly charged with the responsibility of leading schools through the change process—school principals. For this research we conducted extended interviews with 40 highly successful elementary school principals from around the state. The interviews focused on three areas. First, we asked them to reflect on schools in Washington and to talk about the major or primary factors at work that are preventing schools from making the necessary changes. Second, we asked them to rate the relative importance of a number of specific possible factors. Finally, we asked them to consider what changes in policy, law, or conditions would be required before they would agree to assume the leadership of a struggling or troubled school.

## **FACTORS INHIBITING REFORM**

When asked to discuss the main reasons that reform mandates are not being successfully implemented in all schools, these principals were consistent in identifying five general barriers to the reform efforts, including:

- **Lack of skilled leaders**
- **Lack of support**
- **Reluctance on the part of teachers**
- **School climate/environment issues**
- **Pace and nature of the reform effort**

The results of both the open-ended question and the factor rankings indicate that principals believe lack of leadership and vision is the most significant barrier to the implementation of school reform in Washington State. In addition to lack of leadership, principals believe that lack of support (in terms of both money and time), negative teacher attitudes, school climate issues, and the pace of reform in the state are all barriers to accomplishing the goals mandated by the state. The transitory nature of reform funding, critical to providing teachers with training and planning time, has been detrimental

to making necessary changes in the classroom. Principals fear that, without sufficient time for collaboration, planning, team building, and aligning instruction with the EALRs, teachers will be unable to accomplish all that is being asked of them. Principals also believe that resistance to change on the part of teachers is a significant problem. It only takes a few teachers in a school to sabotage reform efforts, they say, and the inability of a principal to transfer those teachers out of the building significantly limits the progress that can be made in addressing reform issues.

## LEADING A STRUGGLING SCHOOL

Although principals discussed a wide variety of powers, lines of authority, and changes they would ask for if moved to a low-performing school, two emerged as being significantly more important than any of the others. These school leaders made it very clear that they would want:

- **Flexibility in policies and regulations, specifically those related to time and administrative support.**
- **Control of staffing decisions, including hiring, transfer, and dismissal authority.**

## IMPLICATIONS

1. The state and districts must recognize that there are multiple factors that inhibit school change. Efforts to further the move toward a system based on high standards, clear student learning goals, and accountability must be systemic in nature and multifaceted in approach.
2. The recruitment and retention of quality leadership in the form of the principal cannot be overemphasized. Efforts must focus on recruitment and preservice training and recognize the changing role of the principal as *instructional leader of the school and team leader*, as opposed to manager, budget keeper, and disciplinarian.
3. In-depth inservice training programs for principals should become a high priority. This training should focus on the changing role of the principal as *instructional leader of the school and team leader*, as opposed to manager, budget keeper, and disciplinarian.
4. Given the multiple roles that the principal is now expected to play, it may be time to move away from the current model in which management and instructional leadership responsibilities are vested in one individual. While both of these roles are important for well-run schools, they do not require the same skills, abilities, or interests, and they may not often exist in one individual. This will require a reconceptualization of current leadership models.

5. The allocation of existing and new resources should be carefully examined to insure that the resources are being used strategically to the fullest extent possible to provide time for collaboration, planning, and goal setting at the school level. Additional new funding, such as new Student Learning Improvement Grant (SLIG) money, should be used for teacher planning time and curriculum development, and should be building and group focused, and not where “every teacher does his/her own thing.”
6. State laws and collective bargaining agreements regarding teacher transfer within the district and/or teacher termination must be simplified to allow principals the ability to deal with reluctant or uncooperative teachers in a timely and effective manner.
7. Because a number of the principals believe that the types of reforms being sought are most difficult at schools with high-need students, additional resources should be considered for those schools *when they have the appropriate school leadership and teaching staff in place.*
8. The state and districts must recognize that struggling schools may be caused by multiple factors. Therefore, policies should be implemented that insure that all of those factors can be addressed adequately if true change is to take place. New leadership may be required, but it may not be the only factor that must be changed. New personnel policies and laws, or waivers of existing personnel policies and laws, may be needed to give the new school leadership the ability to make the changes necessary. These policies should include staffing authority, specifically the authority to transfer or terminate specific teachers. Policies should also be enacted to increase the resources available to the new leader in the school.

**Successful restructuring is the result of careful planning, collaboration and teamwork, clear and common goals, redirected resources, and an ownership and belief in the restructuring process.**

## INTRODUCTION

Since the Washington State Education Reform Act was passed in 1993, schools throughout the state of Washington have been under pressure to increase student achievement and to align their curricula with the new Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs). Students in Washington schools are now expected to meet higher standards, and there are plans to tie these higher standards directly to the earning of a high school diploma.

The 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) test scores for the past several years have indicated that the percentage of students meeting the new higher standards is not satisfactory; but, improvement is being shown every year. There are indications, however, that while some of the elementary and middle/junior high schools are showing marked improvement, others are struggling to adapt to the new expectations and to make the necessary changes.

School restructuring is a process that usually takes several years to accomplish and involves considerable staff development, refocusing of energies, and changes in school climate and culture. It has proven to be no easy task. Yet, a number of schools have made meaningful changes and have increased student achievement.

In the last few years research has been conducted in the state in an attempt to identify those practices that have led to successful school restructuring and increased academic achievement. During 1999, three research reports were released detailing those efforts. In spite of diverse research methodologies, measures of student achievement, sources of data, and school samples, the findings were very consistent and therefore instructive. These studies suggest that successful restructuring is possible within Washington schools, and is the result of careful planning, collaboration and teamwork among teachers, principals, and parents, clear and common goals, redirected resources, including time, and an ownership and belief in the restructuring process. Increased academic achievement follows from these efforts, and is not the result of any specific set of curriculum materials or teaching practices. A brief summary of the three research projects is shown in table 1.

**Increased academic achievement follows from these efforts, and is not the result of any specific set of curriculum materials or teaching practices.**

**Table 1: 1999 Restructuring and achievement studies in Washington State**

Study	Methodology	Sample findings
<p><i>School Restructuring and Student Achievement in Washington State: Research Findings on the Effects of House Bill 1209 and School Restructuring on Western Washington Schools.</i> 1999.</p> <p>Jeffrey T. Fouts</p> <p>Sponsor: School of Education, Seattle Pacific University</p>	<p>Quantitative data obtained from 2,197 teachers from 111 schools, and 16 school districts in Western Washington.</p> <p>Student achievement measure: CTBS results from 1993 to 1997</p>	<p>The degree to which a school is restructured is the single best predictor of achievement gains, and works independent of a school's ethnic or socioeconomic status and size.</p> <p>Restructuring defined as the degree to which teachers, parents, and administrators have worked together to define the goals, beliefs, and expectation for the school, along with a belief in commitment to the restructuring process.</p>
<p><i>Making Standards Work: Active Voices, Focused Learning.</i> 1999.</p> <p>Robin Lake, Paul Hill, Lauren O'Toole, and Mary Beth Celio</p> <p>Sponsor: Center on Reinventing Public Education, UW Graduate School of Public Affairs</p>	<p>Qualitative data obtained from 30 schools whose 4th grade WASL test scores had improved significantly from 1997 to 1998, and 10 control schools.</p> <p>Student achievement measure: 1997 and 1998 WASL</p>	<p>Effective changes in teaching methods and materials are focused and school-wide and represent a philosophical shift.</p> <p>Improving schools operate as teams, with students, parents, and community taking responsibility for improvement.</p> <p>Professional development time is used strategically.</p> <p>Improving schools were no more likely than other schools to receive new funding. Available funds were focused on instruction.</p>
<p><i>Organizing for Success: A Study About Mathematics Assessment Results in Washington State.</i> 1999.</p> <p>Terry Bergeson, Cheryl Mayo, David Kennedy, Mary Jo Johnson, and Beverly Neitzel</p> <p>Sponsors: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Commission on Student Learning</p>	<p>Qualitative data gathered from 53 buildings and 20 school districts that showed significant gains in percentage of 4th grade students meeting or exceeding mathematics standards from 1997 to 1998.</p> <p>Student achievement measure: 1997 and 1998 WASL mathematics.</p>	<p>Attitude, commitment, and focus of teachers and administrators was key to success in student learning.</p> <p>Professional development was essential to improve classroom instruction to impact student learning.</p> <p>No specific program or supplementary program made the difference.</p>



It is important to note that these findings are not necessarily a surprise, nor are they limited to Washington State. They basically reflect the findings of researchers nationwide and over a long period of time. For example, the effective schools research going back at least two decades identified the importance of school-wide efforts, a collaborative environment, teacher participation and ownership, a highly focused instructional program, clear goals, and pupil achievement for evaluation purposes as instrumental for student achievement. The latest edition of this research, *Research You Can Use to Improve Results* (Cotton, 1999) published by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), identifies many of these same factors. It appears then, that the necessary components for reforming schools and increasing achievement have been known for many years and the studies conducted in Washington state last year verify once again that schools can be changed and that student achievement can be improved. Yet, a number of elementary schools in this state have yet to do what needs to be done to improve student learning. Why is this so?

There are two purposes of this study:

- **To identify school, personnel, legal, and other factors that are preventing the needed changes from taking place.**
- **To identify the prerequisite changes necessary before a successful principal would consent to take over a failing school.**

If research findings are consistent about what needs to happen in schools for restructuring to take place resulting in increased student achievement, why has it not

If research findings are consistent about what needs to happen in schools for restructuring to take place resulting in increased student achievement, why has it not happened in a number of schools? What are the factors that prevent teachers, administrators, and parents from coming together in a collaborative manner to build clear and precise goals, build a coherent curriculum, and focus resources and time on instruction? We sought to find some answers to these questions.

## **BACKGROUND**

***The importance of instructional leadership.*** There is an implied finding throughout the three research projects in Washington and a clearly stated finding in many other research studies on effective schooling: instructional leadership within the school is of paramount importance. Instructional leadership is not just having a principal who can keep order in the hallways and balance the budget. Those things are important, but an instructional leader is an individual with a vision of sound teaching and learning who can bring together teachers and parents in a collaborative environment to set clear goals and expectations for student learning, and to organize the school to accomplish those things. A lead story in the January 12, 2000, edition of *Education Week* (Olson, 2000) focused on the

leadership crisis in American schools and that there is “widespread agreement that U.S. schools face a dearth of administrators capable of providing that leadership.” It was noted further that “without strong leaders at the helm, larger efforts to improve student achievement will likely falter, if not fail entirely. The focus on leadership also reflects a belated recognition that standards and procedures alone can’t energize a dispirited teaching staff or bring parents and community leaders together to turn around a failing school.”

**The fate of school reform in Washington is dependent, in part, on the instructional leadership capabilities of the principal found in each school.**

There is much agreement that it is a very difficult job and that the applicant pools for principal jobs are woefully thin. Research in this state by University of Washington professors Williams and Portin (1997) has shown that principals feel more frustrated and less confident of their abilities to be effective and that they work longer hours.

The fate of school reform in Washington is dependent, in part, on the instructional leadership capabilities of the principal found in each school. As the tests scores over the last several years have indicated, some schools are making progress while other schools struggle to make the needed changes. Perhaps the inability of schools to make the needed changes are due to the lack of leadership, but perhaps there are other factors at work that also lessen the likelihood of restructuring.

The focus of this research emerged from a study we released last year and mentioned in table 1. In that study we were interested in the changes in specific educational practices since 1993, but we were also interested in ascertaining the degree to which restructuring efforts, in the view of the teachers, would actually lead to systemic and meaningful change in the lives of the students and what they are to learn, and if they thought these changes would be lasting. For example, Goodman (1995) wrote about “change without difference.” He identified ameliorative or first order change that results in greater efficiency, but does not change the essence of the educational experience. In contrast, radical reform or “second order change” alters the underlying philosophical beliefs driving practice. Ellis and Fouts (1994) defined

**Achievement gains have been greater in the schools where restructuring has taken place.**

similar concepts, comparing bureaucratic/centralized reform with authentic/fundamental reform. In addition, they identified the energizing forces behind the restructuring efforts, contrasting goal-driven/participatory change with arbitrary/mandated change. Their model proposed that only goal-driven/participatory changes would result in lasting second order or authentic reform of education.

Based on these ideas and others from several theoretical models of systemic change and fundamental school reform found

in the literature, we developed an instrument to measure a type of second order change that could serve as a measure of some of the more subtle changes and processes that have or are taking place in the schools and classrooms, as well as the degree of confidence teachers have in the restructuring process and resulting changes.

In our previous study we defined a restructured school as one that has undergone changes that reflect second order or fundamental changes in school philosophy and practice, and where those changes are driven by a collaborative process and clearly defined goals. We attempted to distinguish between simply changing school or classroom practices and the broader concept of restructuring a school. The former can be done without the latter, and in fact has been done repeatedly throughout the recent history of American education. An example of this was our finding that a number of schools had operating site-based councils, but low collaboration. However, restructuring schools implies a new vision, a rethinking and changing of the very philosophy about education, student learning and how schools should operate on a day-to-day basis. From this will flow naturally changes in school-wide and classroom practices.

**Building a learning community is more important than rearranging classroom schedules.**

**Clear and agreed upon goals are more important than technology.**

The most significant finding in our 1999 study was that achievement gains have been greater in the elementary and middle/junior high schools where restructuring has taken place than in those schools where it has not. The best predictor of achievement gains was the Total Restructuring Score, and this was true regardless of the school's socioeconomic status, ethnic composition, or size. While the more highly restructured schools were more likely to have implemented certain educational practices (first order changes) than were the less restructured schools, those more common practices alone were found to be less important than the ideas and actions embedded in the concept of restructuring.

In the previous research the Total Restructuring Score was a measure of the degree to which teachers, parents, and administrators had worked together to define precisely what their school will be, that is, what goals would be pursued, what beliefs would drive the decisions, what would be expected of the students, and how these ideas would be implemented. It was also a measure of the commitment to and ownership of the changes, and belief on the part of the teachers that what they were doing is important and that it will make a long-term difference in their classrooms and in the lives of their students. Our findings showed that actual collaboration is more important than a site-based council. Clear and agreed-upon goals are more important than increased technology. Building a learning community is more important than rearranging classroom schedules. In short, in the restructured schools a new ethos had emerged, and specific school-wide or classroom practices took a back seat to this important component of

changing education. Where the new ethos had emerged since 1993, student achievement had increased.

Schools that had experienced second order change were more likely to have experienced achievement gains. They were also more likely to have implemented certain first order changes than had other schools. However, there is no line connecting the first order changes, such as increases in the use of technology, group projects, or cooperative learning, to achievement gains because no relationship was found. Our findings, supported by much other research, suggest that achievement gains are dependent on second order change, and not on the implementation specific educational practices. Certain specific educational practices may be important, but only in conjunction with or being preceded by second order changes.

**In short, in the restructured schools a new ethos has emerged.**

Our first purpose in this current study was to identify what factors work to prevent second order changes from taking place. We can hypothesize what these factors are, and some of them are listed in the box on the far left in figure 1. These factors, depending on their nature, may either enable changes to take place or may actually serve to prevent changes from occurring. It seems possible that the relationship of these factors to possible changes maybe enabling for some types of changes and disabling for others. For example, a centralized decision making process may enable a school district to dictate that a specific curriculum or teaching strategy be used (first order change), but it may be quite disabling when a school staff wants to use a specific curriculum based on collaborative planning and goal setting.

The accountability plans in many states include special assistance to and/or sanctions for schools that do not make the necessary improvements in student achievement in a given period of time. This often includes new leadership for the school. However, there is an implied assumption that a successful principal will willingly take on a struggling or failing school. That may or may not be the case. A strong principal may hesitate to take over a school if there are a number of “disabling” factors still in place that may prevent second order changes from taking place. The second purpose of this study was to identify the prerequisite changes necessary before a successful principal would consent to take over a failing school.

## METHODOLOGY

There is no shortage of opinions about why schools in the state of Washington are resistant to change. We wanted to find out, however, the perspectives of those people most likely to have the best insight into the schools, those people whose instructional and overall leadership skills are generally recognized as the key component to school change, and those people who are most directly charged with the responsibility of leading those schools through the change process—the school principals. Who would better know what prevents restructuring from taking place than those who have been in the system and have been successful at the task? For this research we conducted extended interviews with 40 highly successful elementary principals from around the state. The interviews focused on three areas. First, we asked them to reflect on schools in Washington and to talk about the major or primary factors at work that are preventing schools from making the necessary changes. Second, we then asked them to rate the relative importance of a number of specific possible factors. Finally, we asked them to consider what changes in policy, law, or conditions would be required before they would agree to assume the leadership of a struggling or troubled school.

**We wanted to find out the perspectives of those people most likely to have the best insight into the schools—the school principals.**

*Defining and selecting “highly successful” principals.* The selection of the sample of principles was a three-step process. First, all superintendents in the state of Washington were invited to submit an unlimited number of names of highly successful principals from their district to participate in the study. Superintendents were instructed to use the following six criteria:

- You consider the principal to be one of the best principals in the district.
- The principal has been a strong leader in a school for several years.
- The principal has successfully made necessary changes or reforms in the building.
- The principal’s school has shown strong increases in student achievement under his or her leadership.
- The principal is well respected by parents and staff.
- If there was a struggling school in your district, this is the type of person you would want to take over and lead the school.

Superintendents from 123 of the state’s 296 districts responded, creating a first level pool of 221 principals from around the state rated as highly successful by their superintendents.

The second step of the selection procedure took into consideration the WASL test scores increases for the principals’ schools from 1997 to 1999. To continue in the pool, the

schools combined percentage increase in students achieving mastery in WASL math and reading had to exceed the state average of 27.1 percent. Eighty-two principals from 55 districts met this criterion.

The third step in the selection procedure was selection from strata based on district size and then by individual district. The breakdown by district size is shown below.

<b>District size</b>	<b>Percentage of sample</b>	<b>n</b>
Over 10,000 students	60%	24
5,000 to 9,999 students	15%	6
2,000 to 4,999 students	15%	6
Under 2,000 students	10%	4

To insure the representation of the largest number of districts, at least one principal was selected from each of the 15 districts over 10,000 students. The remaining nine principals were then selected at random to complete this category. The principals from the remaining district categories were selected at random, with no more than one principal from each district being selected. The 40 principals came from the following districts. The number in parentheses represents the number of principals from that district in the sample.

<b>Over 10,000 students</b>	<b>5,000 to 9,999 students</b>	<b>2,000 to 4,999 students</b>	<b>Under 2,000 students</b>
Auburn	Wenatchee	Medical Lake	Pomeroy
Bellevue	Sunnyside	Eastmont	Cascade
Bellingham (2)	Sumner	Pullman	South Bend
Central Kitsap	Franklin Pierce	Bainbridge Island	Hockinson
Edmonds (2)	Stanwood	University Place	
Everett (2)	Snohomish	North Mason	
Federal Way (2)			
Highline			
Issaquah			
Marysville			
North Thurston			
Northshore (2)			
Puyallup(2)			
Seattle (2)			
Spokane			
Vancouver			
Yakima			

***Interview and scoring procedures.*** Each of the 40 principals was sent a letter asking for his or her participation in the research. All 40 principals readily agreed to participate.

During the pilot testing of the interview protocol, it became apparent that the first question required considerable reflection and forethought. Therefore, approximately one to two weeks before the scheduled interview each principal received a letter describing the nature of the first question and encouraging the principal to give thought ahead of time to it.

The interviews were conducted at the principals' schools around the state during January and February 2000. The interview format included both semi-structured and structured components. The first area of the interview focused on the following open-ended question:

Based on your experience as a principal, and on your perceptions of the elementary schools in this state in ***general*** as you understand them, what are the major or primary factors at work that are preventing schools from making the necessary changes?

Once the principals had given their own views on this topic, they were asked to rate specific factors as to their relative importance in preventing reform. The final part of the interview focused on the following open-ended question:

Before you would agree to assume the leadership of such a school, what changes, powers, or personal authority would you require, expect, or want before you would agree to such a move?

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis by a team of three researchers. Each researcher read all 40 transcripts, identifying major and minor themes for each respondent, as well as any unique responses that emerged. After initial reading and theme identification were complete, the three researchers compared their individual findings, discussing any differences until agreement was reached. Next, broad categories were developed that were representative of the overall responses and that were used in interpreting and discussing the interviews.

# FACTORS INHIBITING REFORM

Open ended question: Consider schools that have not been able to adequately address the restructuring intent of HB 1209, and have not made substantive improvements in the school culture or student achievement. Based on your experience as a principal, and on your perceptions of the elementary schools in this state in general as you understand them, what are the major or primary factors at work that are preventing schools from making the necessary changes?

When asked to discuss the main reasons that reform mandates are not being successfully implemented in all schools, these principals were consistent in identifying five general barriers to the reform efforts, including:

- **Lack of skilled leaders**
- **Lack of support**
- **Reluctance on the part of teachers**
- **School climate/environment issues**
- **Pace and nature of the reform effort**

***Lack of skilled leaders.*** The most frequently mentioned barrier in preventing reform was the lack of a competent leader at the school level. Fully 70 percent of the principals suggested that this is a major problem. Often they likened this person to the captain of a ship, who sets the course and garners the support of others in reaching the destination. In order for a school to follow through on the agenda set by the state, they said, there must be in place a visionary leader who has the ability to bring teachers together, to support them in their efforts at personal and professional growth, and to act as a knowledgeable curriculum and instruction resource. While they were clear that this type of leader is critical to implementation of reforms, they also speculated on why many principals fall short in this area. Many believed that the role of the school principal has changed in recent years, such that they are being asked to take on additional, and more diverse, responsibilities. Many school principals lack the skills to accomplish these tasks, some of which are critical to the effective implementation of reform mandates. For example, leaders must possess the ability to collaborate, to develop and motivate teachers, to help staff members focus clearly on an identified vision, and to provide guidance and training in aligning curriculum and instruction with the EALRs and WASL. As one principal of 18 years noted:

**The most frequently mentioned barrier in preventing reform was the lack of a competent leader at the school level.**

*I think leadership is really, really important. I think that leadership needs to be there in the person of the principal, but also in the principal's ability to develop teacher leaders. It's like a two-layered leadership, or a leadership*



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*partnership would be another way to look at it . . . because without leadership, people just wander all about and do their own thing. Everybody has an idea of what’s most important, what they ought to be spending resources on, and how they ought to use their time. . . . I think it’s critical. Somebody’s got to be the keeper of the dream. Somebody, first of all, has to help people figure out what the dream is, and then keep that dream in front of them all the time and ask the hard questions and be the critical one, the collegial coach. And I don’t see leadership as the autocrat, either. We all have our different styles, but somebody has to do that job, to keep us all on target.*

Or, as a 15-year veteran principal observed:

*One of them [blocks to reform], I think, is that skills that are needed now by principals . . . weren’t needed ten years ago, or even five years ago. It used to be that if you could keep a balanced budget, have fairly good discipline, and keep that area intact, things could go okay. But now, you’ve got not just to keep a budget; you’ve got to find more money and you’ve got to find better ways to spend it. You’ve got to be fairly skilled at group process. You can no longer say, “This is what we’re going to do and I’ve decided where to go.” You have to have a good knowledge of curriculum and assessment.*

Additional comments reflected the necessity of a leader to identify, communicate, and focus on the vision and goals:

*It is the responsibility of the leader—the principal—to encourage an attitude of change and an attitude of excellence in what you are doing. I think it’s critical for principals to have a vision for the students of that building and their education and their academic success, and to communicate that vision and share that vision with the staff, and regularly bring that vision out in front of the staff, so that there’s this attitude of continual improvement and continually striving to reach that goal.*

*I think that, in some ways educational reform is the result of not having good, effective principals prior to the reform being required. I think that one of the things that affects whether or not schools can move towards the goals of reform or be successful or are kept from doing that is really the leadership and the vision and the specific goals that principals have for what they want to accomplish in the schools, and how they convey those goals. If you don’t have those things well developed in your own mind and have them com-*

*pletely integrated in how you go about doing things every day, how you set priorities, how you work with parents and staff, then you're not going to be an effective leader. I think the lack of strong leadership, or the lack of having clear goals for yourself and your school, allows the school to get frequently off track, and to frequently jump from one priority, one area of interest, one specific thing, to another. It sets up a school to be constantly reactive to what's happening rather than being proactive in terms of a long-range goal.*

**Lack of support.** Another important factor in preventing reform from taking place is a broad level lack of support, in terms of funding, time, and training. Half of the principals were of the opinion that lack of funding to support the mandated reforms has the potential to seriously limit what can be done. Over a third of the principals in this sample (43 percent) discussed the detrimental effects of pulling Student Learning Improvement Grant (SLIG) dollars, noting that it was an important and necessary source of money for funding teacher training and planning time. Without it, there was the perception that teachers will not have the necessary resources to effectively develop and revise the curriculum and instructional strategies upon which the required reform measures are dependent. A sample of representative comments:

**Half of the principals were of the opinion that lack of funding to support the mandated reforms has the potential to seriously limit what can be done.**

*The "here today, gone tomorrow" nature of some of the extra monies. One of the biggies that struck me was that they threw a chunk of change at us with second grade when we initiated the testing a couple years ago and now we don't have that.*

*Resources. The basic resources to provide teachers the time. Allowing them to sit down, align curriculum, develop lessons and teaching and how that reflects the changes that we need to make, you know? This is a problem, and it's a bigger problem today, because we've lost the one resource that buildings had control over, and that was the Student and Learning Improvement Grant money, the SLIG. . . . We lost a lot of flexibility that we could use.*

*The biggest issue that I see is time. Time is an obstacle because you have to focus, and your teachers have to have the concentrated time to focus on it. . . . You've got to work together as a team. . . . Without time, it's really hard to do that, because our colleagues don't have the time to talk to each other and work with each other, especially this year without SLIG. That's what I was using the last couple of years that was huge for us. So, I'm really kind of scrambling this year to provide that time for colleagues to meet. So that's*

*probably my biggest barrier this year. And time, of course, is related to funding, because you've got to have funding to provide that, or you have to restructure things.*

***“The biggest issue that I see is time . . . because our colleagues don't have the time to talk to each other and work with each other.”***

*I respect teachers so much that I really believe they want to do what's best, and they want to know what's best, but they also have to be teaching every single day. I think that it all ends with the teacher, and I think that supporting the teacher is what's key, and supporting collegial relationships is what's key. I think if you asked anybody in education, money would come someplace on the list, but time would come first. Time to learn, grow, talk, reflect, and implement.*

Several principals also commented that lack of involvement and support by parents is a factor in preventing school reform. Parents, and the greater community, need to be partners in making positive changes in schools, and without that support, reform is more difficult to accomplish. A relatively new principal commented:

*I don't know what the data is about schools who haven't made some progress, what their level of parent participation is, or how they communicate, or how involved they can be with their parent community, but I certainly think that it could be a preventing thing. Because, on the other side of it, it's been a huge help to me to have parent support. I don't just mean when the kids go home. We have a tremendous number of parents who volunteer in our schools every day.*

***Reluctance on the part of teachers.*** Another significant barrier to reform is teacher attitude. Forty percent of these principals discussed the challenge of trying to make fundamental changes at the building level when one or more teachers express fear or an unwillingness to acknowledge the reform efforts. They note an attitude of “been there, done that” toward the reform movement, and suggest that many teachers are willing to wait it out, assuming that it will only be a matter of time before this latest attempt at change will pass. Whether teachers are fearful of change, overwhelmed by the task, or just downright stubborn about not wanting to participate, principals believe that trying to lead a team where this attitude exists can seriously limit the extent to which reforms can be accomplished. Representative comments:

*I think some of the other issues you run into are older teachers who are reluctant to change. They've seen things come and go before, and in too many minds, probably, the essential learnings are ranked right up there with SLOs [student learning objectives], and they've been there and done that and it went away. I think if I were a building principal in a building with an older staff, with many of them with fifteen to twenty years experience, I think it's harder to turn them. A younger staff is easier to turn.*

*In order for kids to really achieve, the staff has to be on board. I don't mean to be prejudicial or anything, but basically there are some staff members in our schools who are near retirement, who haven't grown, who don't care to, who look at this whole thing as a political statement. What they've been doing in the past just worked fine for them, and they don't choose to change.*

***"In order for kids to really achieve, the staff has to be on board."***

The constraints faced by principals in making staffing decisions are also seen as barriers to the implementation of reforms. Eighteen percent of the respondents suggested that when a school principal does not have the authority to hire, transfer, and dismiss teachers, his or her efforts at making progress in meeting reform mandates can be seriously compromised. The time and energy required for meeting "non-renewal" guidelines is overwhelming, they agree, and significantly detracts from other work that is postponed or left undone. There was general agreement among these principals that once it becomes clear that a teacher can not or will not support the vision and goals of a school to make necessary changes, as leaders they need to be able to move that person and bring someone on board who will join the team. One principal summed it up as follows:

*Transfer language in the contract is usually fairly restrictive in most districts. That might get in the way. It might just be that it's time we moved these two people, and we're moving them and they're going over there. Or, they just need to be moved. They need to be someplace else, because no matter what happened, it gets [demolished.] Or it gets sabotaged coming in the back way. . . . The other thing is that the non-renewal process is extremely time consuming and cumbersome and divisive. It's really a tough road, and you've got to weigh and measure what you're going to get out of it. It's not like telling somebody, "Things aren't working out very well and here are the three things you need to fix. You've got three months to fix them and if you don't fix them, you're gone." It's a little more tedious. And basically, when you go through that process, most everything else in the building shuts down. In the contractual situation that I'm in now, if I were to start that process tomorrow, I wouldn't do much of curriculum kinds of things, because that would just eat up my time from the front end to the back end.*

**Others felt that their peers in highly [demographically] impacted schools face significant challenges because of the pressing needs of their students.**

**School climate/environment issues.** Another area related to the prevention of successful reform efforts has to do with school climate and environment, with 40 percent of the principals identifying this as a barrier to reform. Most frequently mentioned were demographic variables, such as socioeconomic status, and the problems associated with a highly mobile student and/or staff population. Although a number of principals said that there should be “no excuses” because of demographic factors, others felt that their peers who lead in highly impacted schools face significant challenges because of the pressing needs of their students. Children who come to school hungry, tired, and deprived in other ways need

to have their physical needs met before any learning can take place, and principals feel that this takes time and energy away from reform efforts. A principal from one of the larger school districts commented:

*The first thing I see is the socioeconomic factors that are out there. The population that you’re dealing with a lot of times has some other problems that they’re dealing with before they can focus on education. Crime, drugs, homelessness, hunger. . . . A lot of schools have a lot of turnover, both in students and in staff. I can’t imagine being able to put together any sort of concrete program for school improvement with those sorts of problems out there.*

Another sample comment in this area:

*It’s my opinion, but I also think it’s been backed up by every research that I’ve seen . . . kids from lower socioeconomic homes and areas just need so much more background for them to perform successfully on the standardized tests. Students who come in with tremendous social problems, actual disorders—personality and behavioral disorders—just can’t settle down to learn the basics.*

**Pace and nature of the reform effort.** Several factors identified as being barriers to the reform effort have to do with the nature of the process itself. For example, a number of principals suggested that educators across the state are being asked to do “too much too fast,” and are experiencing frustration and burnout at trying to keep up. Other principals noted the difficulty of trying to “fix on the go,” developing and implementing major changes to systems and institutions while maintaining existing programs and services.

Representative comments:

*Another area, I think, is . . . we're trying to fix an airplane while it's in flight. My goodness, teaching is a full-time job. So now we're asking staff to get on board with all the changes that are required and everything, and they're aligning to the EALRs and all the stuff, and while teachers are working on 180-day time chart and kids are here 180 days. Trying to fix and improve this airplane while we're in flight, I think, is ludicrous.*

***“Training of teachers and professional development takes time. It takes money, too. I was very discouraged to see the SLIG dollars removed.”***

*I think one of the hardest things about trying to do ed reform and trying to experience ed reform is that we are trying to fix and steer our plane and we are flying it. We are working so hard to get from day to day that sometimes it's really hard to fix some of the problems, and we know there are problems in our curriculum or in our assessment pieces. Training of teachers and professional development takes time. It takes money, too. I was very discouraged to see the SLIG dollars removed.*

## PRINCIPAL RATINGS OF SPECIFIC FACTORS

Following the open-ended questions, the principals were asked to consider the importance of nine factors as possible barriers to the successful implementation of school reform mandates. Principals gave each factor a rating from 1 to 4, where 1 meant that the factor is very important in blocking reform, and 4 meant that the factor is of little importance in blocking reform. Means and standard deviations were calculated for each of the factors and ranked in order of importance. Results are shown in table 2.

Of the nine factors presented, **lack of leadership and vision** was viewed by these principals as being the most important element in preventing reform from happening. Thirty-seven of the 40 principals (93 percent) identified this factor as very important in preventing reform. A number of principals commented, noting that reform can not and will not happen without leaders who have the ability to share a vision of change, to bring people together in working toward local and statewide

**Lack of leadership and vision was viewed as being the most important element in preventing reform from happening.**

goals, and to provide clear and focused direction to the entire reform agenda. Communication and collaboration are key, they said, to building effective partnerships and make reform happen. This factor was followed closely by **(lack of) planning time and/or funding of the reform efforts**. Thirty-five of the 40 principals (88 percent) identified this factor as very important in preventing reform. It is the view of this group of principals that without sufficient funding for staff development, training, and planning time for teachers, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to meet the goals mandated by the state. Principals are also of the opinion, according to survey ratings, that issues related to **collective bargaining agreements** are important in preventing reform from taking place. Principals' perceptions of the importance of **centralized district decision-making** in preventing reform were mixed, and a number felt the need to qualify their response. One-fourth of the principals noted that although there is danger in having the district make all decisions related to reform efforts, there is a need for their involvement and direction, and to turn over all decision-making responsibilities to the individual buildings would be inappropriate. Balance, they suggested, is important in the decision-making process, both at the district and state levels. Indeed, several principals commented that having reform mandates come from the state was not a negative thing, and in fact, was probably a useful way to begin addressing shortcomings in the field.

While principals generally agreed that class size may be an important factor in preventing school reform, there was less agreement about the impact of school size. Some noted that both are critical to the successful implementation of reforms to raise achievement, while others suggested that school size is relatively unimportant. What matters more, they believe, is the attitude and commitment of teachers and parents.

When asked about the potential of **state and federal regulations regarding education** to prevent reform from happening, principals rated them somewhat important, but commented consistently that decisions regarding title money, SLIG days, and special education

**Parental resistance to the reform efforts was found to be the least important factor in preventing reform from happening.**

guidelines could have serious negative effects on reform. Loss of SLIG money, which was addressed by many principals during the interview, was seen as one of the major barriers to successful implementation of reform initiatives.

Principals rated **district budgeting process** as being somewhat important in preventing reform from happening and, as with **district decision-making**, felt that there was a need for balance between district and school input to the process. Finally, **parental resistance to the reform efforts** was found to be the least important factor in preventing reform from happening, according to these principals. A number of them suggested that if parents are kept "in the loop" in terms of providing clear and ongoing communication about the change process, they can be some of the best supporters of reform.

**Table 2: Ranked order of factors that prevent reform measures from being implemented**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>Percentage of principals identifying factor as very important in preventing reform</b>
Lack of leadership/vision	1.08	.267	93%
Planning time and/or funding of the reform efforts	1.13	.404	88%
Collective bargaining agreement, including seniority, transfer, and accountability policies	1.50	.679	58%
Class size	1.63	.868	58%
District centralization of decision-making process	2.08	.829	23%
State and/or federal regulations regarding education	2.10	1.128	40%
District budgeting process	2.10	1.033	35%
School size	2.18	1.130	40%
Parental resistance to reform efforts	2.80	1.067	18%

Note: Ranking of responses was from 1 to 4, with 1 = very important in preventing reforms and 4 = not important in preventing reforms.

Additional data analysis included a comparison of principal rankings of these factors based on gender and on size of district. In the case of gender, no significant differences were found in the way in which men and women ranked the nine factors. When comparing rankings based on size of district, it was found that principals differed in their perceptions of how important **district centralization of decision-making** is in preventing reform. Principals from smaller districts rated this as being a more important factor in preventing reform ( $M = 1.00$ ) than did principals from large districts ( $M = 2.92$ ).



# LEADING A STRUGGLING SCHOOL

Open ended question: One of the possible actions that could be made to help struggling schools to make the necessary changes in schooling practices and to improve student achievement may be to install new leadership in the school. The second series of questions has to do with your perceptions of what changes would be necessary to encourage successful principals to take over a failing school. Consider for a moment the possibility that you have been asked to take over a school with low achievement and that has not been successful in implementing the necessary reforms associated with the new school expectations. Before you would agree to assume the leadership of such a school, what changes, powers, or personal authority would you require, expect, or want?

Although principals discussed a wide variety of powers, lines of authority, and changes they would ask for if moved to a low-performing school, two emerged as being significantly more important than any of the others. These school leaders made it very clear that they would want:

- **Flexibility in policies and regulations, specifically those related to time and administrative support.**
- **Control of staffing decisions, including hiring, transfer, and dismissal authority.**

*Flexibility in policies and regulations.* Although they seldom used the word waivers, principals repeatedly said that they would ask for flexibility in policies and regulations were they asked to take on a low-functioning school and turn it around. Most often, this flexibility referred to either imposed or perceived time parameters, and 28

***“If I were to go to a school where reform had not been taking place, the reform would probably not be taking place because of poor leadership.”***

percent of the principals specified the number of years they would want. At the very least, a principal in this position would ask for two years to make substantive changes in student achievement, although most respondents believed four to five years would be a more realistic estimate of the amount of time it would take. Additionally, 28 percent of the principals who discussed this hypothetical requirement said that they would first want time to establish a “baseline” at the new school, getting a feel for the culture of the building. It would also be important to assess the progress of teachers in aligning curriculum with the EALRs,

and to identify areas of student strength and weakness. Once a baseline had been established, it would be possible to build partnerships, change or modify curriculum if necessary, and direct intense efforts at addressing reform issues. Two representative comments from principals:

*If I were to go to a school where reform had not been taking place, the reform would probably not be taking place because of poor leadership. So to put myself in the staff's shoes and see that the district or the state or whoever had just given us a new leader, a new authority, I might be angry or resentful. There would definitely be some emotion involved, since there had been some attachment to that former principal for whatever reason. It may be because he let us do whatever we wanted to do and didn't pressure us with reform. It would be a very emotional and stressful kind of transition. I would want to have time with the staff for some team-building activities and for some getting-to-know-each-other activities and an opportunity for me to work with the staff in letting them know who I am and what my expectations of them, as professionals, would be. That requires time and money. I think that it would also require some time from whoever would be looking over my shoulder; whoever would be watching for the improvement, whether that would be the district or the*

*state. They would have to be able to say, "You need a year with this staff with no pressure of looking at scores or the past to develop trust, to develop a bond with this staff so that you could lead them." You couldn't begin leading a staff the first month of being in a building. You're going to be watching them. They're going to be leading you and showing you the culture of the community and so forth. Before you can go in and institute change, you have to find out what's going on at that building besides what's going on that's good. What needs to be changed? What should be added and what should be deleted? That takes time, to evaluate what programs are currently in place at that building. So, I think you have to have time.*

***"Before you can go in and institute change, you have to find out what's going on at that building. What needs to be changed? What should be added and what should be deleted? So, I think you have to have time."***

*We all know that you don't just go in there and start making changes right and left. You need time to develop relationships with people, and to begin to help people and do the things that are important. If you're going to go into a struggling school and have all your time taken up with discipline, disgruntled parents, management stuff that isn't working, you're not going to get to the leadership around reform. So that would be one thing. I'd want to say to the district, "I'm going to want support for creating time. I'm going to want support for creating time for people to work together." And I don't know what that might look like. It might look like early release, it might look like late start.*

Of course, time is often a function of support, which was the other important requirement related to flexibility in principles and regulations. Principals (25 percent) again said that it would be critical to have the full support of district administrators should they agree to take on a low-performing school. Whether principals wanted to make changes in the calendar or the curriculum, or whether they needed additional funds or freedom from deadlines, they would expect backing from the central office. Without such unqualified support, respondents observed, there would be little chance of making significant progress in turning around a school.

*I would want a guarantee of support from the central office that I didn't have to work under the contracts. All the things that we just talked about: that we could change our day, and we could have transportation, that we could have support for when we wanted it, that we could pretty much structure the schools to meet the needs of the kids who were coming to us, that we could have training on demand, as we figured it out, and that the teachers would be paid well in order to do this work.*

*I'd . . . need and want the support of the administration, because if your school, for example, is chaotic, you would need time to work on discipline and safety/security issues. So the first year, I would ask to please just give us an opportunity to address the major issues that would make our school a learning environment . . . because you're not going to get the academic achievement unless you're able to create a safe and secure environment, and to do that you have to have administrative support, from your supervisors and from the superintendent. . . . Fortunately for us, Superintendent \_\_\_\_\_ was very supportive of us when I said, "Listen, you're not going to get the academic achievement because the environment needs restructuring." So we spent that whole year restructuring our environment. So support from the administration is extremely important. . . . Money is less important than having that support.*

**Principals again stressed the need to have authority to hire, transfer, and dismiss teachers in order to put together a collaborative and effective reform-oriented team.**

**Control of staffing decisions.** Equally as important as flexibility in policies and regulations, should a principal be asked to take over a troubled school, would be staffing authority, and 50 percent of this sample indicated that this would be one of their requirements. Principals' views on the negative effects of reluctant teachers have already been discussed, and they again stressed the need to have authority to hire, transfer, and dismiss teachers in order to put together a collaborative and effective reform-oriented team. Working with reluctant teachers is challeng-

ing in high-performing schools, they suggest, and certainly would limit the changes that could be made in low-functioning schools. It is evident from the responses of these principals that any expectations they had about raising student achievement would be heavily dependent on putting together a motivated, focused staff, which would include not just teachers, but also secretarial, custodial, and support staff. One principal said he would ask for:

*Three involuntary transfer chips in my pocket that I can use at any time, for anyone. No questions asked. It's not going to work. We're not going to get it done. You're on your way. We may never use them, but just the knowledge and understanding. . . . It's not secret. Everybody knows you've got them. It's there, and it's not meant to be vindictive because you're not going to get to reform unless everybody's there with you, but you've got to have them.*

Other representative comments:

*Bottom line is staffing. I'd have to have the power to keep who I wanted and bring in who I want and get rid of who I wanted. Your staff is everything. At least they'd have to have the caliber and the potential for a workable staff.*

*As I alluded to before, I think one of the biggest impacts on effective change process is hiring decisions and staffing decisions, and so that's one thing that I feel really strongly about: as principal, to hold people accountable for student learning in a school. I'd also want the authority there to be able to choose who's coming to the school and be involved in that process and that experience.*

*I would have to go in there with the authority to hire and fire. I would have to have the power to build a good staff, and to, with a team of people, pick and choose who can work together. Build a team with common goals and beliefs.*

***“Three  
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questions  
asked.”***

Several other patterns emerged as principals discussed their wants and needs should they be moved to a low-functioning building. Thirty-five percent mentioned the importance of funding, and suggested that were they to move they would want to be guaranteed money for staff development, training, and collaboration, as well as for necessary curricular materials. Principals also discussed the need for additional support personnel, although they varied in just how they would allocate additional staff positions. A few would opt for vice principals, while others (23 percent) saw greater need for counselors, curriculum specialists, or grant writers. Finally, while some principals believed that additional compensation would be important to them in taking on a low-functioning school,

others observed that it would not be an important need, and they would rather use any “extra” money to buy time and training for teachers or to provide incentives for teachers to continue doing the hard work of reform.

When asked if personal compensation would make a difference, two principals commented:

*I don't think so, because I think the reason you do it is because it's a challenge and because you think you could make a difference. Otherwise you and I would be doing something else.*

*It would sort of be nice if there were some type of building stipend. It wouldn't have to be a lot, and not just for me, but for everybody. If you reach your targets, there's a bonus for you . . . a monetary incentive. I am not in favor of . . . an incentive for me, because it's not me that would be doing the work. I mean, I would be doing the work, but I just don't think that would create a good taste in the mouth of all the people who are there, and I wouldn't want that. I'm not going to ask for a personal incentive, but I think if there's going to be an incentive, let's make it a building incentive. We're all in this together.*

Several unique responses emerged as well. One principal felt it would be important to require all parents to take parenting classes, while another insisted that the physical plant would need to be in good repair.

*A lot of times it isn't just instructional or it isn't just material. Sometimes you have a culture in disrepair, and some of these things need to extend to, like, the custodial staff, and they're part of that culture. It may be that you need to come in and literally clean house, come in and literally do a paint job, landscape it; so that people walk in, they know that it's a whole different ball game and something's different here. This looks really different. . . . It may be that you need to do some facility modifications.*

Other atypical responses included getting rid of the union, non-graded school, no evening district meetings for a year, looping, and access to additional federal funding.

# CONCLUSION

## FACTORS INHIBITING REFORM

**The elementary principal must show courage and commitment in addressing goals set by the state, provide motivation and support for teachers, act as a curriculum and instruction resource, and give direction to reform efforts at the building level.**

Responses to both the survey and the open-ended interview question suggest quite clearly that there are a number of factors at work that may be preventing progress in implementing school reform legislation. While many miscellaneous factors were discussed by these principals, including constraints imposed by the traditional school calendar, lack of data-driven decision-making, a shortage of good teacher candidates, and lack of focus on student achievement, there was nevertheless general agreement on five barriers believed to most significantly prevent school reform from happening.

The results of both the open-ended question and the factor rankings indicate that principals believe lack of leadership and vision is the most significant barrier to the implementation of school reform in Washington State. The elementary principal must show courage and commitment in addressing goals set by the state, provide motivation and support for teachers, act as a curriculum and instruction resource, and give direction to reform efforts at the building level. Without this type of comprehensive and competent leadership, schools will have a difficult time making progress in increasing student learning, the ultimate goal of reform mandates.

In addition to lack of leadership, principals believe that lack of support, both in terms of money and time, negative teacher attitudes, school climate issues, and the pace of reform in the state are all barriers to accomplishing the goals mandated by the state. The transitory nature of reform funding, critical to providing teachers with training and plan time, has been detrimental to making necessary changes in the classroom. Principals fear that, without sufficient time for collaboration, planning, team building, and aligning instruction with the EALRs, teachers will be unable to accomplish all that is being asked of them.

Principals also believe that resistance to change on the part of teachers is a real barrier to change. It only takes a few

teachers in a school to sabotage reform efforts, they say, and the inability of a principal to transfer those teachers out of the building significantly limits the progress that can be made in addressing reform issues. Add to this the fact that a number of principals feel reform in Washington is “too much, too fast,” and that they are being asked to make substantive changes to the entire educational endeavor “on the go,” and it is clear that implementing mandated reform measures will continue to be a challenge at many sites across the state.

## LEADING A STRUGGLING SCHOOL

**These principals were consistent and forceful in identifying flexibility in time and money regulations, staffing authority, and, to a lesser degree, money for staff development and additional personnel.**

When questioned about what requirements they might have if asked to take over a low-performing school, these principals were consistent and forceful in identifying flexibility in time and money regulations, staffing authority, and, to a lesser degree, money for staff development and additional personnel as those needs and wants that would be necessary for them to make such a move. Personal compensation was not as important as providing incentives or rewards for teachers. A few principals would ask for smaller class sizes, business partnerships, and assurance of parent involvement.

## IMPLICATIONS

1. The state and districts must recognize that there are multiple factors that inhibit school change. Efforts to further the move toward a system based on high standards, clear student learning goals, and accountability must be systemic in nature and multifaceted in approach.
2. The recruitment and retention of quality leadership in the form of the principal cannot be overemphasized. The identification of the right type leadership for a school is of paramount importance. Those individuals with the desired qualities should be actively sought out and recruited for leadership roles. These findings have direct implications for the content and foci of preservice training programs for these individuals. This training should focus on the changing role of the principal as *instructional leader of the school and team leader*, as opposed to manager, budget keeper, and disciplinarian.
3. In-depth inservice training programs for principals should become a high priority. Like preservice training, this training should focus on the changing role of the principal as instructional leader of the school and team leader, as opposed to manager, budget keeper, and disciplinarian. The training should be provided as professional development for all inservice principals. To accomplish these training efforts, there will need to be a concerted effort to identify the professional expertise to conduct this type of training. Ongoing evaluation of the principals should increase the importance of the principal as an instructional leader.

**It may be time to move away from the current model in which management and instructional leadership responsibilities are vested in one individual.**

4. Given the multiple roles that the principal is now expected to play, it may be time to move away from the current model in which management and instructional leadership responsibilities are vested in one individual. While both of these roles are important for well-run schools, they do not require the same skills, abilities, or interests, and they may not often exist in one individual. This will require a reconceptualization of current leadership models.

5. The allocation of existing and new resources should be carefully examined to insure that the resources are being

used strategically to the fullest extent possible. Existing resources should be reallocated to provide time for collaboration, planning, and goal setting at the school level. Additional new funding, such as new SLIG money, should be used for teacher planning time and curriculum development. However, it is important to note that release time and professional development for teachers should be building and group focused, and not where “every teacher does his/her own thing.”

6. State laws and collective bargaining agreements regarding teacher transfer within the district and/or teacher termination must be simplified to allow principals the ability to deal with reluctant or uncooperative teachers in a timely and effective manner. Because there is evidently a feeling among some teachers that “this reform effort, too, shall pass,” the message regarding the future of the reform and school accountability from the government and educational community must be consistent if teachers are to take these things seriously.
7. Because a number of the principals believe that the types of reforms being sought are most difficult at schools with high-need students, additional resources should be considered for those schools *when they have the appropriate school leadership and teaching staff in place*. Simply putting more resources into existing schools that lack leadership, focus, and a teaching staff committed to the changes will accomplish little.
8. The state and districts must recognize that struggling schools may be caused by multiple factors. Therefore, policies should be implemented that insure that all of those factors can be addressed adequately. New leadership may be required, but it may not be the only factor that must be changed. New personnel policies and laws, or waivers of existing personnel policies and laws, may be needed to give the new school leadership the ability

**This will require a reconceptualization of current leadership models.**



to make the changes necessary. These policies should include staffing authority, specifically the authority to transfer or terminate specific teachers. Policies should also be enacted to increase the resources available to the new leader in the school.

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